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Bureau of Public Affairs • Department of State

Bern Experts Meeting on Human Contacts March 1986

Background: From April 15 to May 26, 1986, the 35 participating states of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) will convene a meeting of experts on human contacts in Bern, Switzerland. This is one of several subsidiary meetings mandated by the 1980-83 Madrid CSCE conference, which reviewed implementation of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. Others have included an experts meeting on human rights that met in Ottawa (May-June 1985), a Cultural Forum in Budapest (October-November 1985), and the Conference on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures and Disarmament in Europe (CDE) that has been meeting in Stockholm since January 1984.

At Madrid, the Soviet Union and its allies strongly opposed a meeting on human contacts and reluctantly agreed to the Bern meeting only at the end of the conference. The West, however, strongly favored it as important to maintaining balance between the humanitarian and security aspects of the CSCE process.

Bern will be the last of the Madrid-mandated subsidiary meetings to be held before the next CSCE review conference convenes in November 1986 in Vienna.

Mandate: The Bern meeting will "discuss the development of contacts among persons, institutions and organizations." Topics such as family reunification, marriage between citizens of different States, and travel for personal and professional reasons will be covered.

In contrast to the the Ottawa Human Rights Experts Meeting, which considered a broad range of human rights principles and issues, Bern is expected to focus on the specific human contacts commitments contained in the Madrid Concluding Document and the Helsinki Final Act, including:

- Dealing favorably with and deciding in the same spirit on applications relating to contacts and regular meetings on the basis of family ties, reunification of families, and marriage between citizens of different States;

- Deciding on applications for family reunification and for marriage between citizens of different States in normal practice within 6 months;

- Ensuring that presenting an application for family reunification or for family contacts will not modify the applicant's rights and obligations or those of his family, including employment, housing, and access to social, economic, or educational benefits; and

- Permitting religious faiths, institutions, and organizations that practice within the constitutional framework of the participating States to exchange information and have contacts and meetings among themselves.

READEX FICHE

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US goal: The US goal at Bern will be to promote practical progress in the area of human contacts. The basis for such progress is not necessarily agreement on new commitments, but rather improved adherence to those commitments already made at Helsinki and Madrid. Therefore, the US believes it is important for the participating States to conduct an objective review of their compliance with the Helsinki and Madrid human contacts commitments. The US, in close coordination with its allies and friends, will explore steps to improve adherence to CSCE commitments and facilitate conditions for human contacts across the division of Europe.

At Bern the West will underscore its continued interest in human contacts as part of the internationally accepted concept of human rights. The US will stress the contribution that freer contacts can make to more constructive East-West relations.

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